

**Suggested Remarks
For Mission Director Jon D. Lindborg
"Books for Asia" Turnover Ceremony
Marawi City Hall
Marawi, Lanao Del Sur
March 15, 2006**

The Honorable Omar Ali, Mayor Marawi City;

Dr. Norma Sharief, Regional Chairman,
Commission on Higher Education ARMM;

Dr. Mona Macatanong, Department of Education
Superintendent for Marawi;

Dr. Steven Rood, Country Representative, The
Asia Foundation to the Philippines;

Mr. Efren Balajadia, Director, The Asia
Foundation's Books for Asia;

Parents, Teachers, and Students;

Distinguished Guests, Friends, Ladies and

Gentlemen:

Assalamu Alaikum!

I am honored to participate today in this
book turnover ceremony, to celebrate our
partnerships and affirm our mutual

commitment to improving educational opportunities for Marawi's children and young scholars. This is also my first visit to the great City of Marawi. I have been in the Philippines only for a relatively short time, arriving from my last posting with USAID in Indonesia a little more than seven months ago. During my short time in country, I have learned just how enduring USAID's relationship with the City of Marawi has been, particularly in the area of education. My office colleagues told me as I was preparing for this visit that USAID actually helped Mindanao State University (MSU) establish itself here in Marawi City during the 1960s. We continue to work in partnership with MSU-Marawi today, as we work together on the Congressional

Internship Program for young Muslim scholars and through the Asia Foundation's Transparent and Accountable Governance (TAG) Project. So by accident or design, there has been continuity in our partnership to improve educational opportunities for the citizens of Marawi and the rest of Mindanao.

But the history of United States government support for education in the Philippines as a whole goes back even further. It started more than a century ago when American volunteer school teachers, who came to be known as "Thomasites," arrived in Manila to help establish the public school system of the Philippines. Today's ceremonial turnover of books affirms and continues the long tradition of cooperation of Americans,

the citizens of Marawi, and all Filipinos to ensure that children and young scholars have an equal opportunity to education.

The Asia Foundation's "Books for Asia"

Program has made a particularly important contribution in this regard, helping to put more than 11,500 books into the hands of students and others in Marawi schools, colleges, madaris, day care centers, libraries, and other centers of learning.

USAID's Education Quality and Access for Learning and Livelihood Skills (EQuALLS)

Program also has mounted a significant effort to bring books to students throughout the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), including here in Marawi.

USAID supports the "Books for Mindanao" component of the "Books for Asia" Program and the EQuALLS Project because we recognize the great need for educational materials here in the ARMM. By providing a full range of books and other reading materials for all levels of students -- from elementary school students to those attending university -- these programs provide students with the most essential tools to learn. "Books for Asia" and EQuALLS help strengthen learning and reading skills, particularly English. And fairly or not, English fluency is especially important to be able to compete effectively in today's global economy.

Of course, education is about more than improving living standards. It is also

about equipping people with the skills to be good citizens - to be able to work constructively with others to forge free, just, and democratic societies, which form the basis for lasting peace. A foundation for peace has already been established here in Mindanao, but there is still work to be done. Stronger social and political institutions must be created to help sustain and nurture peace and ensure the equitable distribution of the benefits of economic progress. These strong institutions can emerge only through the efforts of committed and responsible citizens, and here too education is central.

As I wrap up, I commend The Asia Foundation for the way it runs its "Books for Asia"

Program. While the program is more than half a century old, the partnerships it has struck are innovative and forward-thinking. They leverage the resources of the private sector, donors, and government in the important job of getting books into the hands of students. And the results speak for themselves. Since the program started in 1954, "Books for Asia" has distributed more than 40 million books and other reading materials throughout Asia, with some 13 million books delivered here in the Philippines. That's impressive! The U.S. Government is very pleased to be partners with The Asia Foundation in this great endeavor, along with the publishers in the United States who have generously donated their books, with local governments, such as

the City of Marawi, and with the schools, teachers, and parent-teacher associations at the grass roots.

Before closing, let me honor our partnership with Marawi and its citizens, which goes beyond our collaboration in the "Books for Asia" program. USAID and our partners here in Marawi have been working to improve the reading and math skills of students in Grades 1 to 3 in Marawi schools and to help bridge the digital divide by connecting city schools to the internet. In parts of Marawi, we have helped by making small-scale infrastructure improvements. USAID also supports the Asia Foundation's TAG Project, which has worked with Mayor Ali and his staff to improve city governance. Mayor Ali

and his colleagues in Marawi also worked hard to set up an effective alternative dispute resolution system through the Barangay Justice Service System Project. USAID's health program also is active in Marawi, working with local partners to make service improvements in maternal and child health, modern family planning, and the diagnosis and treatment of tuberculosis. We admire your commitment in all these areas and are very proud to work in partnership with you.

Finally, I thank Mayor Ali and his staff for graciously hosting this important event today. The U.S. Government is proud to work with committed local governments, like the City of Marawi, schools and communities

across the Autonomous Region in Muslim
Mindanao, and with great organizations like
The Asia Foundation to help give children
the education that they need and deserve.

Thank you and good morning.